Approved for Release: 2018/10/02 C06628668

National Foreign Assessment Center

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Latin America Weekly Review

25 May 1978

~~Secret~~

RP LAWR 78-021
25 May 1978

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Argentina: A Bleak Future for Civilian Politics 9

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Despite President Videla's wish for a political opening, incorporation of civilians into the government seems far off.

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Argentina: A Bleak Future for Civilian Politics

Interior Minister Harguindeguy

Argentine Interior Minister Harguindeguy is pressing President Videla to clarify his recent statement of intent to incorporate civilians into the government. Videla may have had to compromise on this issue to secure military support for an extended presidential term.

Shortly after Videla announced in March during a major address that the junta had put the country "back on its feet and it is time to make it walk," General Harguindeguy informed reporters that the ban on political activity is still in force and that most political parties will have no future role. Harguindeguy denied contradicting Videla, saying that the dialogue called for by the President had not yet officially begun.

Despite Harguindeguy's insistence that he is in tune with the President's wishes, their obvious divergence suggests a fundamental lack of agreement at the highest level over the future role of civilians. Moreover, Harguindeguy's categorical statement that there will be no political opening indicates that he has the backing of the other members of the junta and probably the majority of the high command.

A few days after Harguindeguy issued his warning, veteran politician and Radical Party leader Ricardo Balbin was arrested in an outlying province and detained for several hours after provincial authorities turned down a request from local politicians to hold a dinner in Balbin's honor. Other politicians have also been harassed, and two newspapers were shut down for a few days for reporting political maneuvering within the military junta.

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Antipathy toward civilian politics remains widespread within the armed forces. [redacted] the majority of officers in the Air Force and Navy oppose a political dialogue.

3.3(b)(1) [redacted]

3.3(b)(1) In spite of Videla's apparent desire for some sort of political opening, the President may have been persuaded to go along with Harguindeguy to attain his primary objective of staying in power. [redacted]

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